



At this time last year, none of us could have imagined what the year 2020 would be like. We had heard of pandemics and knew that there are organisms and viruses that are harmful to us and could cause serious issues, but so few of us ever had personal experience with a true pandemic that our thoughts about such a thing were mere speculation. In the midst of a novel Coronavirus, one which we've neither seen nor studied before, our level of knowledge was low and our uncertainty was high. I'm not going to spend much time recalling the past year and the toll the virus has taken on individuals and on society as a whole, including the church, but simply reference the fact that the year 2020 will stand as a unique period of time in the history of the modern world and will stick with us, in many ways, far into the future.

With that being said, my New Year's wish for us all is the following: God bless 2021! Having moved through the recent Christmas season and having read through the Gospel stories telling of the birth of Jesus and of the significance of the Messiah who comes into our lives, my hope is that we can focus our hopes and our future plans in ways which uphold what God has done for us in the gift of Messiah. The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus is the Word of God, present from before the dawn of time, who takes on human flesh in the person of Jesus in order to enter into our lives in a uniquely physical way. John tells us that "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." This first chapter of the Gospel of John is filled with hope and promise as John reveals to us his understanding of a God whose love is so great that this God will take whatever course of action is necessary in order to be in relationship with us. John understands fully our frustrations, our fears, our hopes, our needs, our cravings to be made whole. In the midst of the darkness which so often can overshadow our lives as humans and leave us feeling lost and empty, John tells us that God enters into the world with God's invincible light, most profoundly brought to us in the one who lay in the manger, who bore the cross and

who leaped out of the tomb. While John does not share a birth narrative, he takes the story of Messiah even deeper into the plan of salvation which God enacts on behalf of us and of all creation. The Word pre-exists creation. That Word, then, enters into creation to bring God's light to shine in the darkness of this world. As we move through the Gospel, we find that this light cannot be extinguished, not even by death.

The season of Epiphany is not very long, but does continue the Christmas theme of Jesus, the light of the world, entering into the human experience in order to restore relationship with God. In many respects, Epiphany is a season of light, as the light of Christ is made known through the one who serves the will of the Father. Each Sunday during Epiphany we see Messiah manifested, made known, to the people to whom he was sent, culminating in Transfiguration Sunday, where the unique light of Jesus shines in an extraordinary way, only to be understood at Easter.

As we enter a new year perhaps the best thing we can do is look for the places where the light of Christ shines, even in the dark places which surround us. God's love is unbounded and enters into our awareness, often in surprising ways, each bringing new life and hope and promise. Where does this light of Christ shine in your household? Where does this light of Christ shine in our congregation's ministry? Where does this light of Christ shine in our community? Where does this light of Christ shine in the world? The exciting and baffling thing about the presence of Christ active in our lives, and the light that presence brings, is that God's transforming love often touches us in surprising, unexpected ways. The other important point of information, which the writer of John sees as a major theme in the Gospel, is that we, too, carry this light with us. As we share the love of Christ, we share the light of Christ. As we serve others in the name of Christ, we make Christ known. In the ups and downs which lay before us this year, may the light of Christ shine upon us, and through us.